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# Prehistoric copper hoard in the Ganges Basin

By
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we must set out prehistoric cultures; the known sites of the Harappa civilization stretch from the Himalayan foothills to the Gulf of Cambay, a distance of 700 miles, and the hoards of copper implements discussed in this paper, all showing characteristics uniting them as the product of one culture, have been found over an area at least 800 by 500 miles, mainly lying within the Ganges Basin.

The distribution of these finds is shown in fig.1, on which the known sites of the Harappa culture are also plotted. The hoards vary in number from over 400 copper objects at Gungeria down to two or three: isolated finds of implements are comparatively rare and may be suspected as residual examples from hoards otherwise lost. Details of known finds are given in an appendix, and while it is probable that more exist unpublished or recorded in obscure publications the distribution pattern seems consistent and sound. The copper (or occasionally bronze) types represented in these finds may be divided into two main groups - axes (including specialized forms of 'bar-celts'), and harpoons; there is also a notable hoard of swords, and silver ornaments were associated with the Gungeria hoard. No find has been made under conditions of scientific or even moderately intelligent supervision, water-buffaloes and peasants having shared the honours of kicking the implements from the ground; but it was recorded that the Gungeria hoard was packed carefully as if originally in a wooden chest. The finds are at present scattered throughout the museums of India and Europe, while some have become godlings in Hindu temples.

These preliminaries make it clear that the only light that can be thrown on the hoards is from a study of the typology of their contents, particularly by comparison with the well-documented finds of metal tools in the Harappa culture. We may conveniently begin with the axes and analogous implements which form the great majority of objects in the hoards. The essential and basic feature of these is that there are

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socketed types, all objects being variations on the most primitive form of metal axe - the 'flat axe' in usual nomenclature, the'blade axe' of Marshall and Mackay. Earlier commentators such as Vicent Smith naturally regarded this simple axe-form as in itself evidence of great antiquity and of a very primitive culture, but the Harappa evidence has shown that a highly evolved urban and literature culture-equalling and and in some respects excelling the contemporary civilizations of the ancient East can yet retain the most curiously primitive forms of metal tools. Indeed, no more convincing exemplification of the isolation of the Harappa culture, and the tenuity of its contacts with Sumer in the middle of the second millennium B.C., can be given than the complete absence of any trace of Sumerian influence on its metal equipment. The revolutionary discovery of the use of the socket in metal tools and weapons profoundly affected the evolution of types over an enormous region beyond the homeland of the invention, yet India only received the idea of socketed axe and adze types (as e.g. in the mattock from Mohenjo-daro and the axes from the Shukar levels at Chanhu-daro and from Shahi-tump) at second hand sporadically, and after the collapse of the Harappa civilization when the barbarians were pressing eastwards.

The prototype of the extremely simple axe-type characteristic of Harappa goes back to the earliest days of metallurgy in Iran, occurring as it does in Sialk III and Giyan V, while not much later, in Susa I, we have axes which, with their splayed cutting edge, nearly parallel sides, and wide square-topped butt, accurately represent those in use in Western India probably nearly 2000 years later.

The great majority of the implements appear to be of pure copper, and a few have been analysed and confirm this impression. Four analyses confirmed an outward appearance of bronze, with the tin content ranging from 13.3 to 3.8 per cent. - a wide range, but well within the Harappa variations of tin

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percentages. The possible natural sources for the copper from which these implements were made are limited. Excluding the deposits in the Outer Himalayas, the two main areas of copper-ore deposits in India are westwards in Rajputana (Ajmer, Alwar and Udaipur regions) and eastwards in the Chota Nagpur and Singhbhum areas. In both areas are abundant traces of ancient (though undated) workings, with slag-heaps and other mining debris, and as will be seen from the map (fig.1) the hoards under discussion fall between these two regions. The extensive Singhbhum deposits seem the most likely source for the concentrations of the finds around Palamau and Ranchi, and probably for Gungeria: the implements in the Jumna-Ganges plain may also have been made from metal from this source or from the Rajputana ores which are presumed to have supplied the metal-smiths of the Harappa culture. Spectrographic analysis of the implements and of the ores should give a more precise indication in conjunction with the analyses already published of the Harappa copper and bronze objects.

The axes and analogous tools fall into five main types, and it must be stated at the outset that the typological variations do not appear to have much significance, most of the forms appearing mixed with others in almost every find. The simplest form, A, is a rather stumpy axe with rounded butt and nearly parallel or very slightly tapering sides (fig.2,no.1); it certainly does occur associated with typologically early harpoons at e.g. Mainpuri and Bithur, but it also occurs at Gungeria associated with practically every other axe-form. Parallels to so simple a type are not likely to be of great significance. Type B has tapering sides which narrow to a small butt at e.g. Bithur (fig.2,no.2), and a sub-form has an expanded cutting edge and incurved sides well represented at Gungeria (fig.2, nos.3 and 4). A partial parallel can be found in the Harappa culture (2) and at Nal in Baluchistan(3),

2. Mackay, Chanhu-Daro Excavations, pl.LXX,no.30.
3. Hargreaves, Excavations in Baluchistan 1925 (A.S.I.Memoirs no.35), pl.XIV.

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but at the latter site the axes have tapering sides which tend to slight convexity. Type C from e.g. Bithur and Rajpur (fig.2, nos.5,6,7 and 8) is parallel-sided with square butt, approximating closely to Harappa forms, while D, exemplified mainly from the more southeasterly sites (fig.2, no.9) is a shouldered form without metal parallels at Harappa,

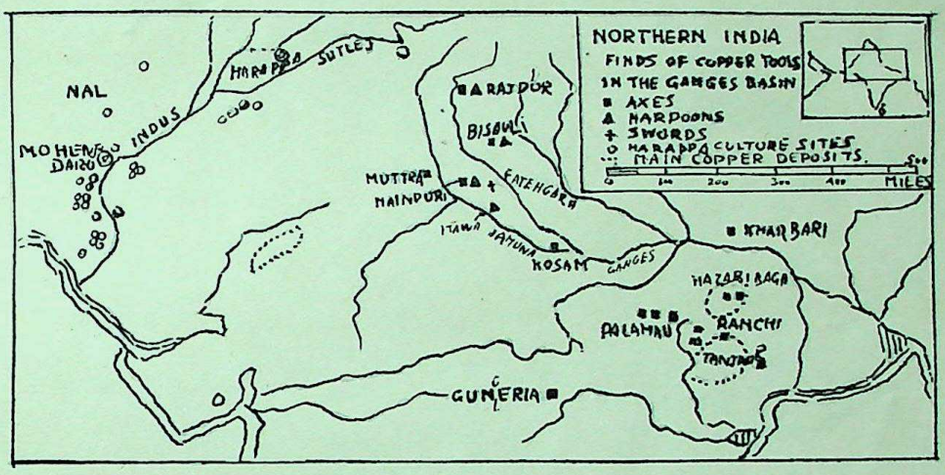


FIG. 1

though it is a form which could have developed from our type C axes (e.g.fig.2, no.8) and has been compared by R.A.Smith to shouldered stone axes from Burma. Finally type E, the bar-celt, is a peculiar form discussed separately below. Exceptional forms represented by isolated specimens included an axe with lateral lugs in the 'trunnion celt' manner from Kurram near Ranchi, paralleled by an almost equally isolated and remote specimen from Turang Tepe in northern Iran (4).

In general these axes are of forms which could all probably be derived from those of the Harappa culture, but their forms are too simple to admit of more precise co-relation. But the bar-celts present a rather more hopeful line of enquiry. These elongated axe or chisel forms (fig.2,nos. 10 and 11), to which the name bar-celt was given by R.A.Smith in describing the British Museum's share of the Gungeria hoard(5), are more characteristic and specialized objects than

4. Survey of Persian Art, 1938, I, 166.
5. British Museum Bronze Age Guide, 182-3.

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the simple axe-types with which we have been dealing. Typically the bar-celt consists of a nearly or completely parallel-sided bar which may be up to two feet long, expanding at one end into a blade which is more or less expanded and lunate. The edge appears to be normally bifacial and not a true chisel edge. Such bar-celts have been found in the ~~xxxx~~ hoards at Gungeria (where they were abundant), at Rajpur and at Harni (Palaman).

Although precise parallels to these tools do not occur in the Harappa culture, nevertheless we can I think see predisposing origins in the axe and chisel types from more than one site, notably at Chanhu-daro. Chisels with the handle in one piece as a solid straight bar are known from th the three main sites of the culture, but at Chanhu-daro we can see the appearance of an extremely narrow elongated axe up to 13 inches long, with almost parallel sides and having a ratio of width ~~xx~~ to length of about 1:11 as against an average of about 1:3 for the normal run of Harappa axes (6). The existence of such forms might plausibly be considered to given rise to our bar-celts, and indeed in a context almost certainly dating from very late or post-Harappan times a copper chisel or narrow axe has been found which foreshadows the bar-celts though not reaching their great size.

The prehistoric cemetery at Nal, in the Kalat state of Baluchistan, was partially excavated by Hargreaves in 1925 and produced among the grave-goods not only a large series of polychrome painted vessels which have given their name to a distinctive style among the prehistoric wares of western India, but also a number of copper implements, mainly falt axes but in one group including a chisel with ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ unexpanded cutting -edge similar to some Harappan forms 4.85 ins. in length and with a length-width ratio of 1:24, and another chisel-like implement recalling the bar-celts in ~~xxxx~~ outline with its slightly expanded cutting-edge, 9.2. ins.

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~~xxxx~~ 6. Mackay, op.cit.pl.LXVIII, no.II, cf.also the elongated axes with length-width ratios of 1:8 & 1:6.5 on pl.LXXI,9 &10. The Harappa ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ chisels have a ratio somewhere around 1:20.

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long and with a length-width ratio of 1:30(7). The axes from Nal, with their tendency to curved sides and narrow butts, do not conform to the Harappa series though flat-tanged spear-heads in the same finds vaguely agree with Indus types. In general however the copper tools from Nal form an individual group and their dating is a matter of some importance.

Briefly, the dating evidence is as follows. Stylistically the pottery from the cemetery is an evolution of that best represented at Nundara in south Baluchistan, and this Nundara ware is to be equated with that of Kulli in the same region on the grounds of an identical treatment, with horizontally banded haunches and shoulders, of animals on Nundara ware and painted pottery figurines from Kulli (8). I have shown elsewhere (9) that there is reason to date Kulli ware as contemporary with Early Dynastic Sumer at least as terminus a quo, and Nundara ware shows the pipal-leaf motif of Harappa derivation which should imply a date nearer Akkadian times, while further Harappa motifs appear at Nal. The cemetery was dug into a deserted settlement of Red Ware folk with some Kulli affinities; a copper stamp-seal which may come from the village or less probably from the cemetery is paralleled in the Shahi-tump cemetery where it is associated with others datable to post-Harappa times (10). In general, while Nal probably overlaps with the later phases of the Harappa culture in seems likely in the main to be subsequent, a position reinforced by the sherd of Nal ware from the later (Jhukar period) occupation of the Lohumjo-daro site in Sind (11).

We have then some evidence of implements of the bar-celt type being made at the close of the Harappa period or

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7. Hargreaves, op. cit pl.XIVa, nos.52 and 44.
8. Cf. for instance Stein, An Archaeological Tour in Gedrosia (A.S.I.Memoirs no.43), pl.XXV,Nun.7 and Nun.IV,12, with pl.XIV,Sh.T.ii 17 or pl.XXXI,Mehi II, 3, 1a.
9. Antiquity 1943, XVII, 169-82.
10. Hargreaves, op. cit. pl.XVd(Nal); Stein op. cit. pl.XIV, Sh. T.VL29. (Shahi Tump).
11. Majumdar, Explorations in Sind (A.S.I. Memoirs, 48), 57. I have examined this sherd which is certainly Nal Ware.

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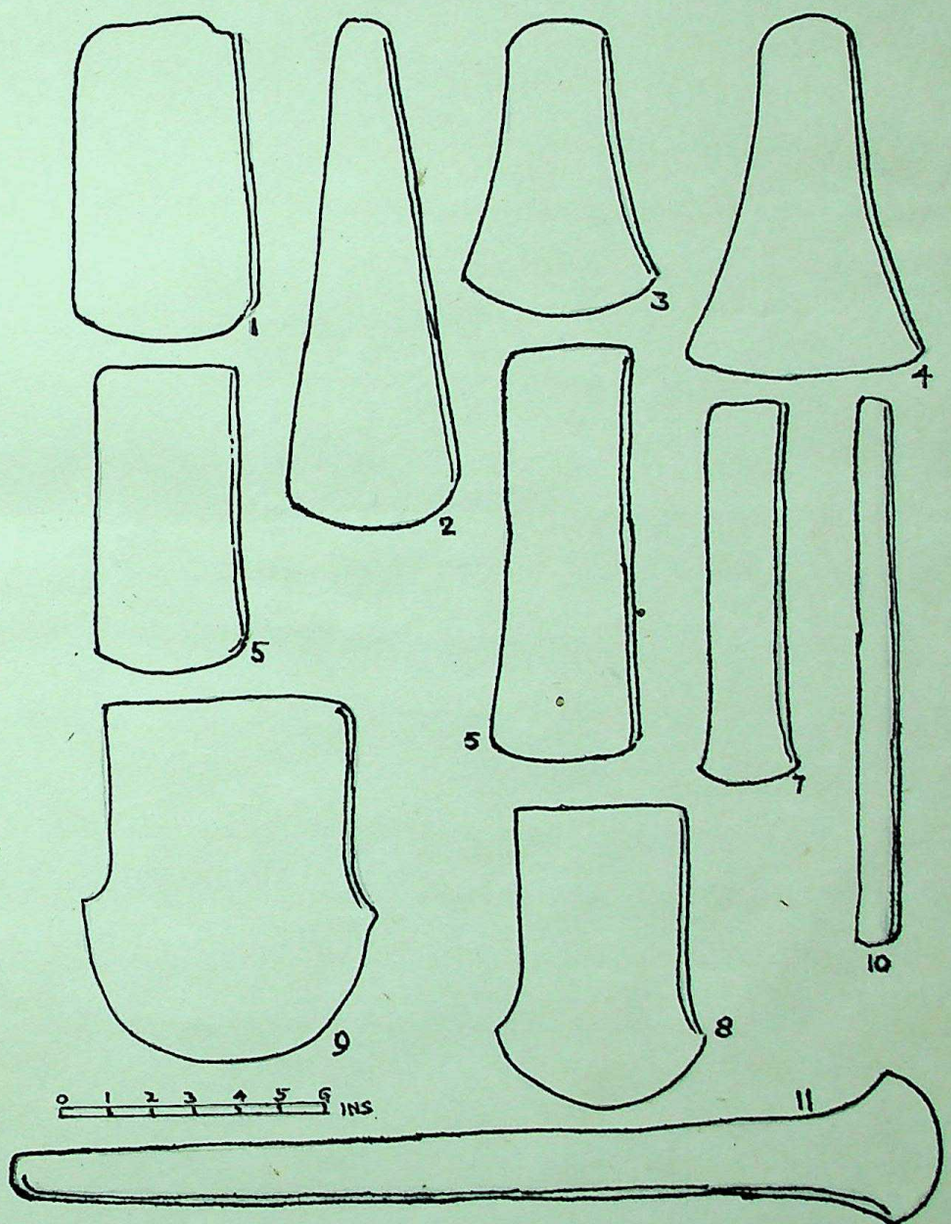


FIG. 2. COPPER AXES AND BAR-CELTS FROM THE GANGES BASIN AND GUNGERIA.

Pl. 2

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later, but it must also be remembered that Nal is immensely remote from the nearest bar-celt find, at Rajpur on the Ganges. (It may be noticed in passing however that this particular implement with its practically unexpanded cutting edge comes nearest to the Nal type (fig.2, no.10). Until intermediate links are established the Nal finds cannot be more than suggestive pointers, and we are not at present in a position to say more than that the axes and analogous tools from the hoards could all be derived from types known in Harappan metallurgy. More precise connexions cannot be established.

The harpoons constitute a most interesting type with, it may be said at the outset no parallels in the Harappa culture, nor so far as I am aware elsewhere in the metal types of the ancient East. More than a dozen examples are known, and practically the whole of these fall into a clear typological sequence as shown in fig.3. The most primitive form, represented by those from Bithur (nos.1 and 2) consists of a rough blade with bilateral barbs, slight medial thickening, a simple tang and one or more holes below the lowest pair of barbs. This type, represented again from Mainpuri (no.3), is seen in rather more sophisticated form in an unlocated Indian specimen now at Dublin (no.4), in which the blade is becoming a separate element behind which are set the barbs. Finally, as at Rajpur (no. 5) we have a very accomplished piece of metal-working with leaf-shaped blade and characteristic curved barbs, and twice the size of the other examples. Throughout all the types the hole at the head of th the tang persists, and functionally is represented on at leas one large plain-bladed harpoon by a lateral projection.

It did not escape Vincent Smith's notice that the typologically early harpoons were not in themselves forms natural to metal, but were copies of bone or antler shapes and with the finds in the Dorgogne coming naturally to his

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mind he quoted Magdalenian parallels. Nor did he fail to point out that these weapons were true harpoons, detachable from their haft but secured to a cord tied through the hole or onto the projection at the base of the blade. To these sound observations we may add a third - the distribution map makes it clear that these harpoons are a function of a riverine culture confined to the Ganges-Jumna regions, for they are restricted to this area, whereas the axes have a far wider distribution into the uplands. In these primitive copper harpoons we see in fact the reflection of a group of early food-gathering tribes, with a specialized economy presumably centred on fish-spearing, acquiring a knowledge of metal-working from some centre of higher culture and ~~xxx~~ transforming their characteristic hunting weapons accordingly.

The assumed prototypes of these harpoons raise most intriguing questions for Indian prehistory. Today we need not look quite so far in time and space as to the Upper Palaeolithic of western France for bone-barbed harpoons or fish-spears comparable to the Indian metal copies, but still far enough: we know that the Mesolithic food-gathering cultures so well documented in northern Europe extended eastwards into the Asiatic steppes and survived far longer here than did their Scandinavian counter-parts; but even then ~~th~~ the chronological and geographical separation of these cultures from the Ganges in the second millennium B.C. is enormous. The earliest settlements of Iraq and Iran show by the fifth millennium an already well-established food-producing village culture, and with the persistence there of some lithic industry we can as well equate the later stone-blades which may possibly exist to the exclusion of metal at certain Baluchistan sites (where this may after all merely indicate poverty rather than high antiquity) and certainly persisted into the Harappa culture. While there seems as yet no evidence of final palaeolithic cultures in Iraq and Iran from which bone-barbed points might be ~~derived~~ ——

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derived (12), the early Natufian unilaterally barbed points in Palestine (13) imply possibilities of such Mesolithic types in other areas of the ancient east, though in India itself undated surface finds of microliths are the only indication of a mesolithic culture which migh intervene in some regions of the country between the Middle Palaeolithic and the first metal-using cultures coming in from the west. But these copper harpoons do imply that there existed alongside the urban civilization of Harappa, and the less highly organized but nevertheless well characterized food-producing communities of the villages of Sind and the Punjab, primitive tribes of hunters and fishers whose equipment

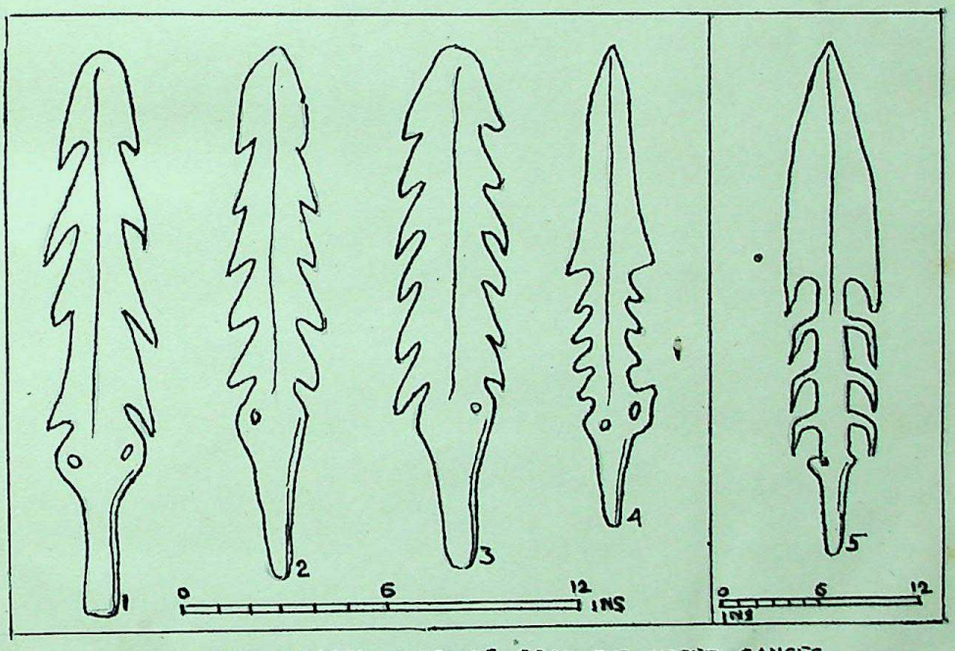


FIG.3. COPPER HARPOONS FROM THE UPPER GANGES.
1, 2 BITHUR, 3: MAINPURI, 4: No LOC; 5: RAJPUR.

included types which find their best analogues in the final mesolithic cultures of the west and northwest. For the present, direct archaeological links are absent, but some

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12. The remarkable stone statuette from Amk in North Syria might possibly be regarded as showing an East Gravettian art style persisting into Sumerian times in that in that region, but it stands alone and cannot be used as definite evidence. (Melanges Syriens, 1939, I, 135-7).

13. Curwen, Antiquity, 1941, xv, 326 with refs.

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hint as to the nature of the yet undiscovered ~~xixixxx~~ ultimate pre-metallic cultures of northern India may be contained in these interesting skeuomorphs.

The survival of a primitive type of hunting weapon by reason of its satisfactory form is of course frequent in higher cultures; the chert 'petit tranchet derivative' arrow-tips from one of the 'Royal Tombs' at Ur (14) are a case in point, and on the reliefs in the VI Dynasty tombs at Sakkarah hippopotami are shown being speared with harpoons with a single-barbed detachable head secured to a rope in precisely the manner we have assumed for our Ganges examples (15). Curwen has drawn attention to analogous iron-barbed harpoon-heads until recently in use for pig-sticking among the Andaman Islanders(16).

There is within our area one hoard which stands apart from those already discussed and is of outstanding interest. At Fathgarh was found a group of thirteen large swords (fig. 4) apparently of copper (though not analysed), with slight midribs and all but one with characteristic 'antennae' hilts; a type paralleled in India by another hoard of four such swords from Kullur in Hyderabad State, Deccan (17). The presence of these sophisticated and martial weapons strikes ~~xxxx

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among the axes and harpoons of a primitive peasantry with which we have been dealing, and their intrusive nature is made clear when we seek in vain for prototypes for any such weapons of war among the Harappa metal inventory. For comparison with the characterestic hilt we must indeed turn to weapons from such regions as the Caucasus and South Russia, and we may opportunely refer at this point to the bronze sword from the Punjab, now in the National Museum of Antiquities of Edinburgh, with a peculiar hilt accurately paralleled in the 'Luristan' swords of Iran (18). Some link between the Fathgarh swords and the other hoards is afforded by the presence at Fathgarh of an 'anthropomorphic' figure of sheet-metal, which appears to be paralleled by another found recently with an axe and a harpoon at Bisouli, but the weapons raise problems of their own. If they are, as seems likely, intrusive to the area, we can hardly avoid the temptation of relating them to some aspect of the Aryan immigration into India. In the search for material evidence of 'Vedic' culture these swords, with their implication of warrior invaders, seem perhaps to be the likeliest claimants up to date.

Other objects associated with the axe-hoards include plain copper rings from two or three sites, and a number of silver ornaments from Gungeria, made of thin sheet metal cut into discs or stylized bulls' heads. There seem no relevant parallels (19).

The foregoing review of the copper hoards of the Ganges Basin and elsewhere in northern India has not perhaps advanced us in a positive fashion much beyond Vicent Smith's remarks of forty years ago. But we have seen that there is no good reason to believe that the tools represent

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18. Vicent Smith, 1905, p.243. For Luristan types cf.Survey of Persian Art,IV,pl.55. I am indebted to Mrs.K.R.Maxwell-Hyslop for her comments on these weapons.
19. The stylized moufflons' heads in sheet-gold from Hissar III might be mentioned in passing, but they are sufficiently remote from Gungeria;(Schmidt,Excavations at Tepe Hissar).

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a discovery of the principles of metallurgy independent of the Harappa culture, itself originally deriving its knowledge of copper and bronze working from the ancient cultures of Iran. The axe-types, even the aberrant bar-celts, belong basically to the primitive unsocketed form which so unaccountably survived in the Harappa culture long after it had been superseded elsewhere in the civilized Orient, and although the simplicity of the forms themselves give little opportunity for stylistic comparisons, such as are possible are not incompatible with Harappa derivation for the whole group. In the harpoons we see a specialized food-procuring implement translated direct into copper by people as yet unacquainted with forms proper to metal; here too is a suggestion that the acquisition of the technique of metallurgy by the fish-spearing tribes of the Ganges-Jumna plain did not necessarily bring with it any of the other elements of the higher culture from which it was obtained, and that a primitive food-gathering economy may have continued basically unchanged by the adoption of a metal equipment. In this connexion the iron barbs of the Andamanese harpoons mentioned above may be cited, or the iron points of the digging-sticks of the Chenchus of central India, who today are still purely in a food-gathering state of culture (20).

How this cultural borrowing was effected is at present completely obscure. The Harappa culture may prove to have an eastward extent as yet unsuspected, and further field-work may well provide some surprizes. Examination of the sites of some of the hoards might not be unprofitable - the 'mound or tumulus ... a few feet in height' from which the Rajpur hoard came might yield early material, more accessibly situated than the huge early Buddhist sites at Muttra and Kosam (not known to antedate the third

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20. Fuhrer-Heimendorf, The Chenchus (1943), passim.

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third century B.C. on available material) which appear to have produced copper axes from some unspecified location and level. We do seem to have in the hoards, nevertheless the expression of a uniform culture as yet unrepresented by other finds. The full content is unknown, but its date should lie somewhere near the close of the Harappa culture as we know it in western India, and certainly well before the third century B.C., when archaeological evidence for the full use of iron is available. We may plausibly equate the deposition of numerous and sometimes very large very large hoards with a period of disturbance and economic instability within the period 1500-300 B.C. in which we have rather vaguely placed our hoards. The legendary half-history of India abounds in such upheavals, earliest and most famous of which is the coming of the Aryans from the northwest, their settlement in the land of the Five Rivers, and their subsequent expansion eastward down the Ganges valley, to which the Fathgarh swords may perhaps bear witness. Beyond these possibilities we cannot go: elucidation of this 'Copper Hoard Culture' is yet one more challange to archaeological research in India both by field-work and by excavation.

## POSTSCRIPT TO PAPER ON COPPER HOARDS OF THE GANGES VALLEY

Since the forgoing paper was written Mrs Maxwell-Hyslop has drawn my attention to R.Heine-Geldern's paper, 'New Light on the Aryan Migration to India', in Bulletin of the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology (1937), V,pp.7-16. Several points to which I have drawn attention independently have already been made by Heine-Geldern - the comparison between the trunnion axes from Turang Tepe and Kurram, the Punjab and Luristan swords and the Fathgarh hoard with its Caucasus analogues. Neither

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this paper, nor the author's other study in Journ. Indian Soc. for Oriental Art, IV (1936), were available to me when my own paper was written in India.

## APPENDIX - LIST OF COPPER HOARD SITES

References to Smith are to Vincent Smith's paper quoted above; to JBORS are to the Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society.

| Site | Axes & Bar-celts | Har-poons | Various | Publications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bargunda (Hazaribagh) | Many | - | Copper rings | Bruce Foote, Pre-historic Antiquities, Madras Mus.Notes (1916),164. |
| Bassia(Ranchi) | 21 | - | - | JBORS,I,127-8. |
| Bithur | 14 | 4 | Two. Cu. fragments | Smith |
| Bisouli | 1 | 1 | Copper 'human figure' | Information from Dr. K.N.Puri 1944. |
| Fathgarh | - | - | 13 swords & human figure | Smith |
| Giridih (Hazaribagh) | 5 | - | - | Proc.Asiatic Soc. Bengal,1871,231. |
| Gungeria (Balaghat) | 424 | - | 102 silver ornaments. | Smith |
| Harni(Palamau) | 23 | - | - | JBORS, I, 239 |
| Itawa | - | 1 | - | Smith |
| Kahabari | 3 | - | 2 rough Cu. lumps | Smith |
| Kosam | 1 | - | - | Smith |
| Khunti(Ranchi) | 5 | - | - | JBORS, I.239 |
| Kurram(Palamau) | 1 | - | - | Ann.Rep.Arch.Survey 1913-14, 247. |
| Mainpuri | 2 | 1 | Copper rings | Smith. |
| Manbhum(Ranchi) | 27 | - | - | JBORS, II,85. |
| Muttra | 1 | ? | - | Smith |
| Palamau | 2 | - | - | JBORS, I.125,Ann.Rep. Arch.Survey 1913-14, 246. |
| Pariar | 4 | - | Broken copper object | Smith |
| Rajpur(Bijnor) | 10 | 6 | - | Smith |
| Tamajuri | 1 | - | - | Smith |

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